

# RED ALERT!

## TAZRI'A-M'TZORA

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## DIVREI TORAH

- The woman who has given birth offers two sacrifices, one as a whole burnt offering and the second one as a sin offering. Although she seemingly has committed no sin, she has been barred from entering the sanctuary until fulfilling this sacrificial obligation. The Talmud Nida 31b records that students asked Rabi Shimon bar Yochai, “Why did the Torah say that a birthing woman brings a sin offering?” RASHBI responded, “At the time when she squats down to give birth, she hastily swears that she will no longer be joined with her husband; therefore the Torah said, ‘let her bring a sacrifice.’” The Minchat Chinuch (Rabbi Yosef ben Moshe Babad of Tarnopol, 1800-1874) points out that Rabi Shimon bar Yochai’s explanation is followed by a number of questions raised by Rabbi Yosef. Since these challenges go unanswered, concludes the Minchat Chinuch, Rabi Shimon’s opinion is rejected. Sefer HaChinuch suggests that Hashem is motivating the new mother to thank Hashem for her miraculous deliverance after the life-threatening experience of giving

birth. Minchat Chinuch challenges this premise because then she should not be giving a sin offering, but rather a thanksgiving offering. He concludes that bringing these offerings is the will of Hashem and the reason remains unknown to us.

- I suggest a different approach. The Chatat – sin offering – might be connected to her becoming impure. Maybe this is one and the same question: not only why does she bring a sin offering, but why does she become impure at the moment of giving birth, when she is adding purity in the spirit of Hashem by bringing a new Neshama into the world? Perhaps this teaches us that impurity results not only from contact with death in some fashion, but also in a decrease of Kedusha, holiness within us. During the months of pregnancy the woman’s level of Kedusha rises. She has within her an additional Neshama; an additional life. When she gives birth, that additional life departs from her, rendering her into a lower form of Kedusha as a result of the birthing process. Maybe this is the reason for her being referred to as a Tamei, an impure person, and recognizing this in a fashion to result in a sin offering.

- The period for which she must absent herself from the sanctuary differs from her giving birth to a son or giving birth to a daughter. The daughter results in an 80 day

abstention from the sanctuary. The boy determines a 40 day period. I believe that in actuality it should have been equal and it should have been an 80 day period for both birthing experiences. The reason the mother of a boy is quicker to offer her sacrifices is because of the brit mila. The brit is set at the 8th day and the reason that it is included in this parsha is to connect it to the counting of the length of time that she is impure. Everything is hastened and accelerated by virtue of the fact that the 8th day is not compromised; and due to the circumcision, her time of impurity is accelerated to a quicker end. (I once gave this as a drasha many years ago and found this concept later in the writings of Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman of early 20th century Germany.)

- Rabbi J. David Bleich cites an interesting observation in his book on bioethics. He mentions that Aristotle (De Historia Animalium VII:3) declared that a male fetus is endowed with a rational soul on the 40th day of gestation, and the female fetus is endowed with a rational soul on the 80th day of gestation. What source did Aristotle have for this determination of a distinction between the female and male fetus, and the numbers that he states? There is no factual evidence to connect Aristotle's statements to the Torah, yet the coincidence is remarkable.

Aristotle's opinion was later incorporated in Canon and Justinian law. (I thank Rabbi Efrem Goldberg of Boca Raton Synagogue for pointing this out.)

- The biblical afflictions that we read about this Shabbat are interpreted by our Sages as a physical manifestation of a spiritual disease. Normally we quote the Talmudic source, identifying the word of Metzora to Motzi Ra, a person who speaks evil of other people. Clearly Lashon HaRa is the dominant disease that has invaded the body and the neshama and hence the biblical treatment of the physical manifestation that results. In actuality, the Talmud links TZARAAT to other sins as well: the sin of bloodshed, taking a false oath, sexual immorality, pride, robbery, and selfishness, can all result in this same physical manifestation of becoming a M'ITZORA. The question of the week is a challenging one. There is a case that our Sages state in TaNaCH whereby a judge in Sefer Shoftim became afflicted with TZARAAT. The challenging question to you is: which judge was afflicted? The difficulty is that the text in Sefer Shoftim does not state that this judge was thusly afflicted, but our Sages did say so. What makes it interesting is that the sin that the judge committed was not one of Lashon HaRa but actually one of arrogance. Which judge was it? (Extra credit: how did our Sages know

to interpret the text in this fashion with reference to that particular judge?)

- In all of the sins involved that could produce TZARAAT, the treatment is the same according to the Torah, and the M'ITZORA is identified publicly. Shunned, he is easily identified by the way he must dress and present himself, and yet is isolated completely. He deserves to be outside the camp of Israel. He does not deserve to be part of the Torah society. This would clearly be understood in the case of the sin of Lashon HaRa, but analyze closer this list of other sins presented previously in this Torah dialogue, and we realize that many sins that a person can commit should deservedly be dealt with in the same fashion – expulsion from society. The isolation of the individual is a time of forced introspection so that he can truly repent and mend his ways. Most punishments are not designed to create a feeling of rehabilitation. If a person receives a physical punishment, as in the case of being flogged for a transgression, it is a punishment deserved but it is not directed to penitence. In this case of isolation, with the hope that he will return to his family and to society, this is clearly an effort to rehabilitate the sinner. The isolation is thoroughly enforced. He must suffer consequences. When he returns to society he is now without blemish because he

has successfully been able to fulfill the requirements of penitence and purify himself from the sins that he committed.

- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch of 19th century Germany comments on the halacha that a one-day old child can be afflicted with TZARAAT. The obvious question is: if our Sages say that TZARAAT is brought on a person as a punishment for his sins, why should an infant who has not sinned be so punished? Rav Hirsch posits that just as a form of NEGA (affliction) can invade a garment or a house as a warning to its owner, so too a NEGA on the forehead of an innocent child is the most impressive admonition to the parents to examine their ways. They need to consider what kind of example their behavior will serve to their child. This is clearly what I would call hitting the parent hard where it counts. The Torah is stating that every parent is accountable for the imperfections that will cling to our children. The affliction on an innocent child will be a clear and effective warning from Hashem, stronger than if it affected the person himself. Can this thought that Rav Hirsch brings to the table be applied to the general responsibility of parents in the upbringing of their children? Ultimately there is a certain responsibility that parents must take when a child grows up and deviates from proper behavior.

## Questions by RED

### From the text

1. What law do we learn from “On the eighth day his foreskin will be circumcised”? (12:3)
2. What sacrifice does a mother bring after giving birth? (12:6)
3. Who is the person who determined the purity or impurity of TZARAAT? (13:2)
4. What happens to the two birds in the ritual process to purify the M'TZORA when he has healed? (14:6)
5. Why does the owner of the house with TZARAAT empty the house of all the furniture before the Kohen comes to inspect the house? (14:36)

### From Rashi

6. Which sacrifice of the birthing mother comes first, the sin offering of the whole burnt offering? (22:8)
7. What must the Kohen do to declare a person Tamei, impure? (13:3)
8. What kind of quarantine does the M'TZORA undergo? (13:4)
9. Why is the M'TZORA required to call out “Contaminated, Contaminated” when in public? (13:45)
10. What blessing was there in the case of the house with a NEGA? (14:34)

### From the Rabbis

11. Why is the mother of a newborn boy going to the Mikveh after one week and not after two weeks like a mother who had given birth to a girl? (Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman, 1843-1921, Germany)
12. Why does the birthing mother bring a sin offering? (Nida 31b)
13. Give two examples that Rav S. R. Hirsch uses to prove that the TZARAAT has nothing to do with contagion, a hallmark of Medical Leprosy?

### Midrash

14. Why are the laws of TZARAAT of a house given after all the laws of TZARAAT of a person's body?

### Haftara - M'lachim Bet

15. What was the name of the enemy country and what city did they set siege upon?

### Relationships

- a) Kehat - Amram
- b) Amram - Yitzhar
- c) Amram - Korach
- d) Aharon - Korach
- e) Naftali - Guni

## **ANSWERS**

1. That the Brit Mila must be during the daytime.
2. A sheep and a dove.
3. A Kohen
4. One bird is slaughtered and the live bird is dipped into the blood and then sent free in the air.
5. If the house is declared impure, then all the contents of the house would become impure as well.
6. The sin offering.
7. He must say out loud: You are Tamei.
8. He must stay alone in his room for a week. (The Rosh states that the discolored skin is “isolated”. The Kohen draws a line around the patch of skin, and that way he can see after a week if it changed shape.)
9. People should stay away from him. The Talmud (Moed Katan 5a) has another answer: that people should pray for him.
10. When the Amorites saw the advancing Jewish nation coming in their direction, they hid their precious jewels in the walls of their houses.
11. In order to allow the mother to become pure before her son’s Brit Mila.
12. Because in the agony of childbirth, she might have sworn never to live again with her husband.
13. A Chatan and Kalla are not

inspected during the week of Sheva Berachot. And there are no inspections during Chol HaMoed.

14. Because the laws of the house are not afflicted until Bnei Yisrael settled in Eretz Yisrael.

15. Aram set siege against Samaria, Shomron.

## **Relationships**

- a) Father & Son
- b) Brothers
- c) Uncle & Nephew
- d) First Cousins
- e) Father & Son